

4 June 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, NIC

SUBJECT : Comments on DRAFT SNIE 34/36.2-82: Implications of Iran's Victory Over Iraq

This is a generally impressive draft in view of the haste with which it was prepared. The following comments are intended to raise questions whether it would be desirable to sharpen several points.

I. Iranian intentions:

A. The draft suffers from a lack of clarity and inconsistency over what is meant by "Iran's victory over Iraq." Some judgments treat the effects of Iran's successes so far. Others are addressed to implications of an invasion of Iraq, an attempt to incite a Shia insurrection, or a bid to install an Islamic regime in Baghdad.

B. The discussion of Iran's options to bring Saddam Hussein down—agitation among Shias and Kurds, limited military incursions, and a major military attack to spark a general insurrection or to cripple the Iraqi Army—implies these are discrete choices. Isn't it more likely that the Iranians will employ the first two simultaneously and, if these fail to produce the desired results, will continue them as adjuncts of a "major" attack?

C. Judgments regarding the likelihood of a major invasion deserve greater weight. If the draft is correct in asserting that Saddam's overthrow "is neither necessarily imminent nor assured without direct Iranian action," wouldn't it be prudent to strengthen the judgments regarding the likelihood of a major invasion? More attention might be given to the Khomeini regime's nationalistic incentive to settle accounts with Saddam and to its authentically "Islamic revolutionary" ambitions to spread the revolution throughout the Gulf, particularly into predominantly Shia southern Iraq.

D. The discussion of prospects for Iraq might also include the contingency of de facto partition into a Shia client state, autonomous or even independent Kurdish areas, and a Sunni rump state under Saddam or his successor. It is admittedly difficult to judge Syria's assets in Iraq, but some reference might be made to the possibility of a Syrian attempt to replace the Baathist regime with one based on the Syrian-supported "Patriotic National Democratic Front for Iraq."

2. Moscow's attitude:

A. The judgment in paragraph 79 deserves a closer look. Is it accurate to conclude that if the Soviets fail to "come down on one side or the other," or if they gamble on the "wrong" side, this "could cost the Soviets dearly in the Persian Gulf?" The Soviets probably believe their policy of neutrality has served them well, and it seems doubtful that even a major Iranian invasion would

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cause them to "choose sides" unequivocally.

B. The first sentence of paragraph 82 should be recast to clarify the meaning of "The Tehran regime seems willing to turn to Moscow and its allies despite widespread suspicion of the USSR." It seems highly unlikely that even if Iran fails to oust Saddam or an invasion bogs down, Tehran would "turn to Moscow" in the usual meaning of this phrase.

25X1 C. Is it accurate (paragraph 86) to attribute to Moscow a realization that "the immediate effect of Iranian predominance would be a move by the Gulf states closer to the United States?" Isn't it equally plausible that the Soviets would anticipate that these [redacted] regimes will instead shift to a more "neutral" posture, avoid provoking Tehran, and work out expedient accommodations with Iran? [redacted]

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25X1 D. Is it plausible (paragraph 88) that, in the event of an Iranian invasion, the Soviets "might issue veiled warnings to Tehran to desist," or "try to employ the Syrians to lobby with Iran to halt any drive in Iraq?" While it is probably true that the Soviets do not want to see an Iranian-oriented fundamentalist regime established in Baghdad, it seems unlikely that they would openly attempt to avert an Iranian military/political victory. From the outset of the Iranian revolution, the Soviets have taken a long-headed view. They are not convinced that the present clerical dominance represents the final and permanent phase of the revolution, and they are playing for high, long-term stakes in Iran. It would be contrary to Moscow's consistent view and policy for the Soviets at this stage to attempt to restrain the Iranians and thus to risk their long-term prospects for establishing significant influence in an Iran that is hostile and alienated from the Western world.

### 3. Implications for the US:

A. Paragraph 92 "Sizable Arab military intervention" is a straw man and could be deleted entirely. The draft earlier discounts the possibility of Arab military intervention and a "general Arab-Persian war."

B. Paragraph 94 deserves a closer look. The judgment that the Iraq-Iran war "is advancing some US interests" is fragile at best and open to serious challenge. Will the Gulf Arabs really respond to the Iranian threat by being "more willing to accept US support in the intelligence and security fields", or is it equally likely that they will move instead to distance themselves from Khomeini's "Great Satan" in order to purchase safety and appease Tehran? These states, moreover, are moving toward abandoning Saddam. Bahrain, for example, reportedly has rejected an Iraqi request to permit their ships and aircraft to use Bahraini facilities to attack the Iranian coast.

C. The judgment in paragraph 94 that moderate Arab need for US support will "increase the US bargaining position for obtaining greater strategic cooperation against the Soviets and for gaining concessions on some Arab-Israeli issues" is very much open to challenge. It is not so much a question of "driving moderate Arabs toward accommodation with the Soviets and Iran" as the impossibility of translating US support for Iraq into greater Arab support for US policy toward the USSR and the Arab-Israeli conflict. "Linkage" is a peculiarly American notion that would seem to have little relevance to Arab interests in these fundamental issues.

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D. Paragraph 100 offers speculative judgments about the dynamics of the Iranian revolution that might better be excluded from this limited estimate. It seems improbable that a non-provocative Western/Arab response to Iran's successes will deny the clerics the benefits of an "external threat." They have fully demonstrated their capacity to contrive threats where none exist. It also seems dubious that the Iranian revolution is destined to experience a Thermidorian period which would provide the US with "more attractive options for influencing Iranian policy." The last sentence acknowledges that "this is no more than a "longer term hope." In any event, such an improbable prospect has no bearing on the contingencies covered in this estimate.



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Special Assistant for Warning